Claims:

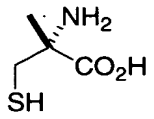
1. A process for preparing S-(2-aminoethyl)-2-methyl-L-cysteine comprising the steps of

(i) reacting an alcohol of Formula 2

R_1OH

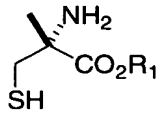
Formula 2

wherein R_1 is C-1 to C-8 alkyl or cycloalkyl with 2-methyl-L-cysteine (Formula 1),



Formula 1

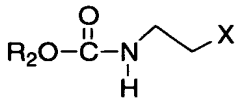
or a salt therof, to give the cysteine ester of Formula 3



Formula 3

wherein R_1 is as defined for Formula 2;

(ii) reacting the thiolester of Formula 3 is with an alkylating reagent of Formula 4



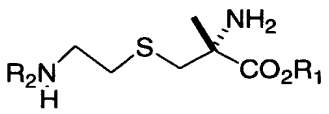
Formula 4

wherein R_2 is selected from the group C_{1-6} alkyl, C_{1-6} alkenyl, trichloroethoxy,

tri-C_{1-6}-alkylsilylethyl, benzyl and phenyl;

X is selected from the Cl, Br, I, $-SO_2Ar$, $-SO_2CH_3$, $-SO_2CF_3$;

to provide the cysteine derivative of Formula 5, or a salt thereof ,



Formula 5

wherein R_1 and R_2 are as defined for Formulas 2 and 4; and

(iii) hydrolysis of the intermediate of step (ii) to provide the title compound.

2. A process according to claim 1 wherein R_1 is isobutyl.

3. A process according to claim 1 wherein R_2 is 1,1-dimethylethoxycarbonyl.

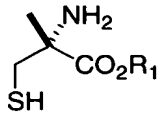
4. A process according to claim 1 wherein R_1 is C_1-C_8

5. A process according to claim 1 wherein R_2 is C_{1-6} alkyl, C_{1-6} alkenyl, trichloroethoxy, tri-C_{1-6}-alkylsilylethyl, benzyl or phenyl;

6. A process according to claim 1 further comprising the use of a tertiary organic base in an organic solvent in step ii.

7. A process according to claim 1 further comprising the use of a two phase mixture of a suitable immiscible organic solvent, an aqueous solvent and a phase transfer agent of the structure $R_1R_2R_3R_4NX$ wherein R_1-R_4 are independently C_1 to C_{16} alkyl or benzyl and X is a suitable counter ion.

8. A compound of Formula 1

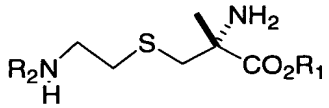


Formula 1

wherein R_1 is C-3 to C-8 alkyl or cycloalkyl.

9. A compound of Formula I wherein R_1 is isobutyl.

10. A compound of Formula II, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof,



Formula II

wherein wherein R_1 is C-3 to C-8 alkyl or cycloalkyl and R_2 is selected from the group C_{1-6} alkyl, C_{1-6} alkenyl, trichloroethoxy, tri-C_{1-6}-alkylsilylethyl, benzyl and phenyl.

11. A compound of Claim 10 wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable salt is benzoate.

12. The use of a compound of Formula 1 for preparing compounds of Formula 2.

13. The use of a compound of Formula 2 for preparing S-(2-aminoethyl)-2-methyl-L-cysteine.